

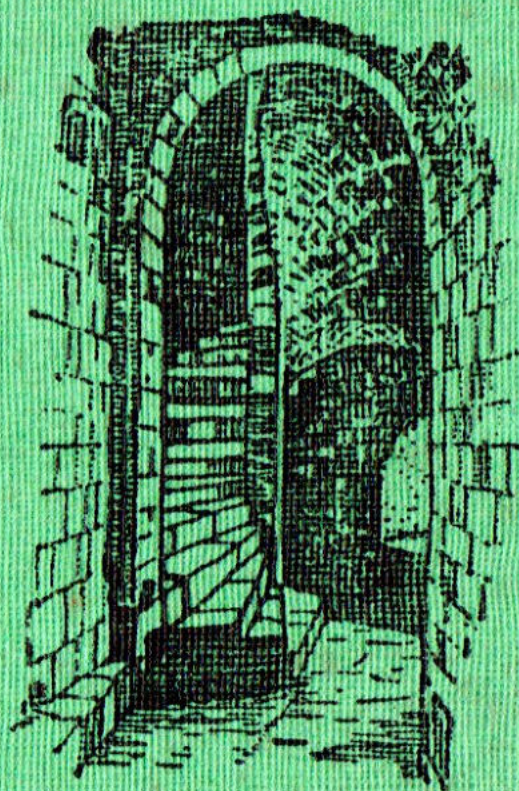
History Bookshelves

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ENGLISH  
CASTLES

BY  
A. F. TITTERTON

DRAWINGS BY H. WEISSENBORN



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GINN



## CONTENTS

### PAGE

#### *Wooden castles*

The motte. Bayeux Tapestry pictures.  
William the Conqueror builds. English  
destroy. The bailey 1

#### *Stone castles*

The keep. William I's castles. Changes  
from wood to stone; Windsor Castle 5

The inside of a keep. Visit to Orford  
Castle. Differences in keeps. Things to  
look for 8

Castles built by barons. Choosing sites;  
Kenilworth and Pembroke 14

The shell-keep. How made; Totnes 15

#### *Attacking and defending a castle*

Scaling ladders; siege towers; stone-throw-  
ing machines; the ballista; burning liquids.  
Mantlets; penthouses. The ram; the bore;  
the mine 18

#### *Changes in castles*

Wooden galleries; towers; gate-houses;  
the barbican 22

#### *New kinds of castle*

Concentric castles; Harlech. Square  
castles; Bodiam 27

## Wooden castles

When William of Normandy came to conquer England, he built a castle near Hastings. In the Bayeux Tapestry is a picture of men working at this castle. There is a copy of this picture on page 2. You can see that the men have made a mound of earth and built a fence round the top of it. A mound of this kind is called a motte, the fence is a palisade. Some men are still digging away below the mound, deepening the ditch and piling up the earth.

William of Normandy was used to this kind of castle. In France there were numbers of them. Both the king and the great lords made them. Often they chose a hillside above a river as a place for a castle, but even there they might pile up this great mound of earth, with a deep ditch all round it, to make the central part of the castle. On the mound they made the palisade and inside that they built a high wooden tower.

Four of these castles are shown in the Tapestry. You can see a picture of one of them, at Dinan, on page 10 of *The Bayeux Tapestry*. There is the mound with the fence





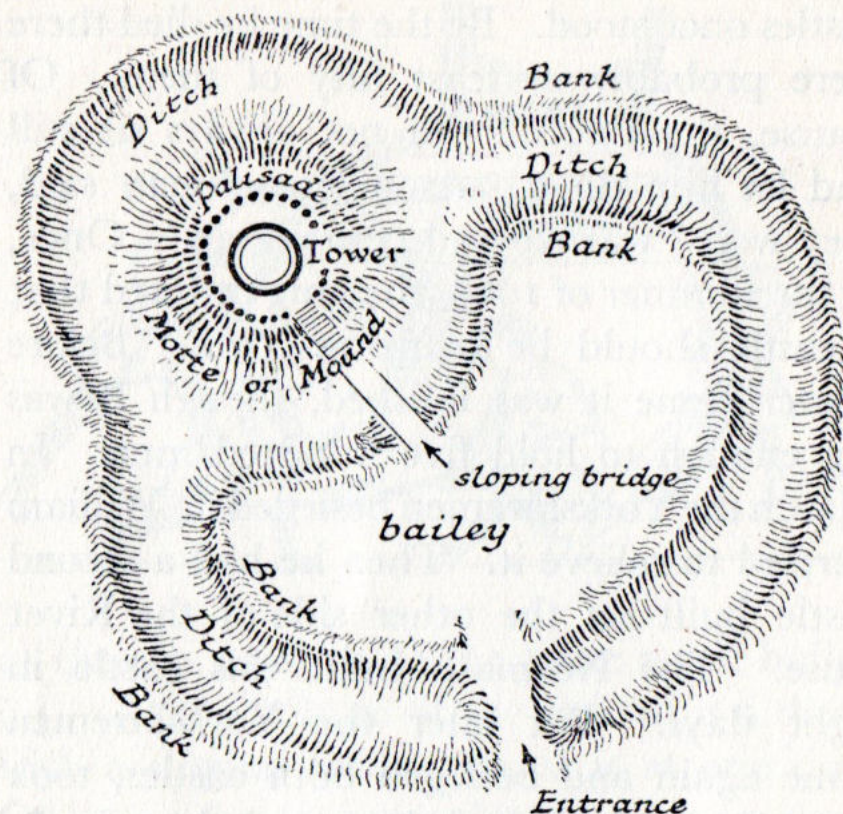
at the top, and inside the fence a tall building. At the bottom of the mound is a ditch with a sloping bridge across it at one side. Of course this tapestry picture is not an exact picture of the castle. Nor is the picture of the castle at Hastings on this page an exact picture. Apart from anything else, all the figures have to be made far too big compared with the castle.

As William the Conqueror's army moved through England he had more and more of these castles built. Some were built either just outside or just inside the walls of important towns to keep the people in order. At Oxford and Cambridge and Lincoln there are still mounds where the Conqueror's

castles once stood. By the time he died there were probably at least fifty of them. Of course, the English did not always sit still and let him do it. As a Frenchman said, they were 'warlike and courageous'. Once, in the summer of 1068, the king ordered that a castle should be made at York. Before winter came it was finished, though it was big enough to hold five hundred men. In March the Yorkshiremen besieged it. William hurried to relieve it. Then he had a second castle built on the other side of the River Ouse. The Normans built this castle in eight days. But later the Yorkshiremen came again and besieged both castles, took them in ten days, and destroyed them both. (Because he could not force the people to submit to him, William burnt and destroyed all the houses and farms for miles around.)

One thing that the pictures of castles in the Bayeux Tapestry cannot show is that each of these castles had a bailey. This was an enclosure or courtyard made at the foot of the motte. Usually it was on the most convenient side, though it might make a ring round the motte instead. The bailey was surrounded by a high bank with a ditch outside it. The bank was made by digging





*Plan of a motte and bailey castle*

the ditch and piling up the earth. On top of the bank was a palisade. The men who chose the position for the bailey had to keep in mind that it should be a place where there was a good spring of water. In the bailey were barracks, stables, a kitchen, a dining-room and store-rooms. If the castle was besieged and the garrison found that they could not hold the bailey, they could carry supplies of food and water and arms across the bridge and up the slope into the castle.

## *Kings of England mentioned in this book*

William I	1066
Henry I	1100
Stephen	1135
Henry II	1154
John	1199
Henry III	1216
Edward I	1272
Edward III	1327

Not only the king but barons went on making these wooden castles for a number of years. When Henry II became king in 1154, nearly ninety years after the Norman Conquest, he knew that many of the barons used their castles as places from which they might bully their neighbours, so he had a number of them destroyed. Still, castles were built after that, but not so many of them.

## *Stone castles*

### THE KEEP

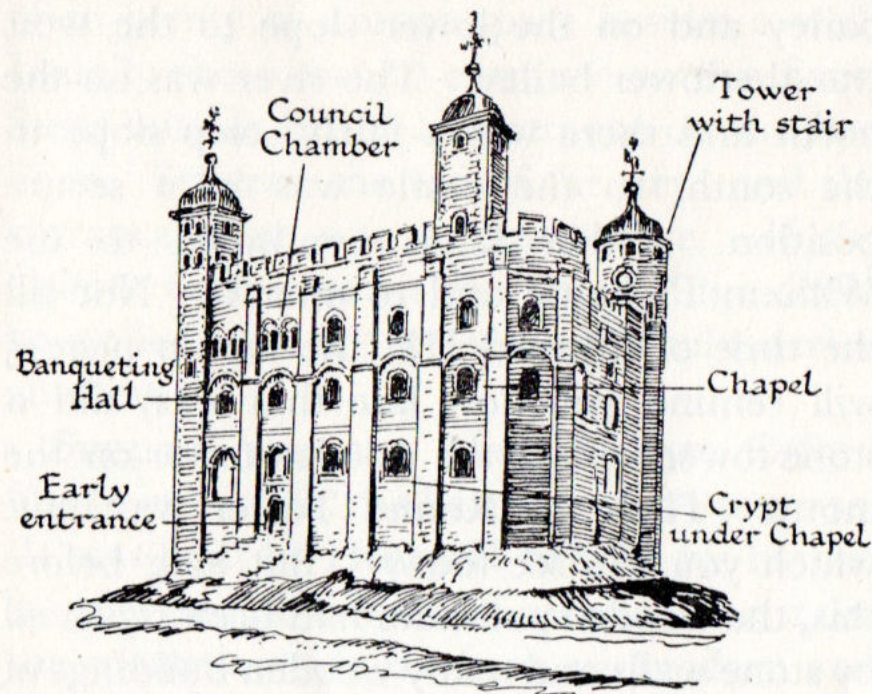
Readers can never see any of those wooden castles. The most that they can see is the mound on which a wooden castle once stood. But many readers may have seen a stone castle, or parts of one which is now a



ruin. William I began to build a few stone castles. One of these is now known as the White Tower of the Tower of London. Another was Colchester Castle. A third was at Richmond in Yorkshire.

Those who have been to the Tower of London will know that the White Tower is what is called a keep. It is a big, square-looking tower, with thick walls and narrow windows. William built the White Tower on a slope above the River Thames just outside the walls of London. It was there to keep the people of London in order. The one which he built at Colchester was even bigger, though the upper half is gone now. Though this castle, too, was built on a slope at a corner of the town, it was not there especially to scare the people of Colchester. It was there in case Saxons from the east should come over the sea and up the neighbouring river mouths to help the Angles and Saxons of England against the Normans.

Sometimes a wooden castle standing on a motte was later replaced by a stone keep. (This could only be done when the earth of the motte had had time to settle into a really hard, strong mound.) Windsor is a castle



*The White Tower today*

where this change was made. William the Conqueror had built a wooden castle there. He had found a place where a steep chalk cliff rose from the bank of the Thames. Soldiers in a castle there could keep a good eye on people moving up and down the valley of the Thames. So on the hill above the cliff he had raised a motte with a wooden tower upon it and a deep ditch or moat below. On the slopes at either side of the motte, to east and west, he had made a bailey, bounded by a wooden palisade. On the higher slope to the east was the upper



bailey and on the lower slope to the west was the lower bailey. The river was on the north and there was a fairly steep slope to the south, so the castle was in a secure position. Other kings continued to use William I's castle and to alter it. Not till the time of Edward III (the list on page 5 will remind you how late that was) did a stone tower replace the wooden tower on the motte. Then the Round Tower was built which you can see today. But long before this, the wooden palisades had been replaced by stone walls and many wooden buildings of the bailey by stone buildings. Since then the walls and buildings have been altered time and again. But if you look at the plan of Windsor Castle today which is shown on the centre pages, you will see the tower high on the motte and the two great enclosures. These enclosures are now called wards. Ward, not bailey, is the name given to the courtyard of a stone castle.

#### THE INSIDE OF A KEEP

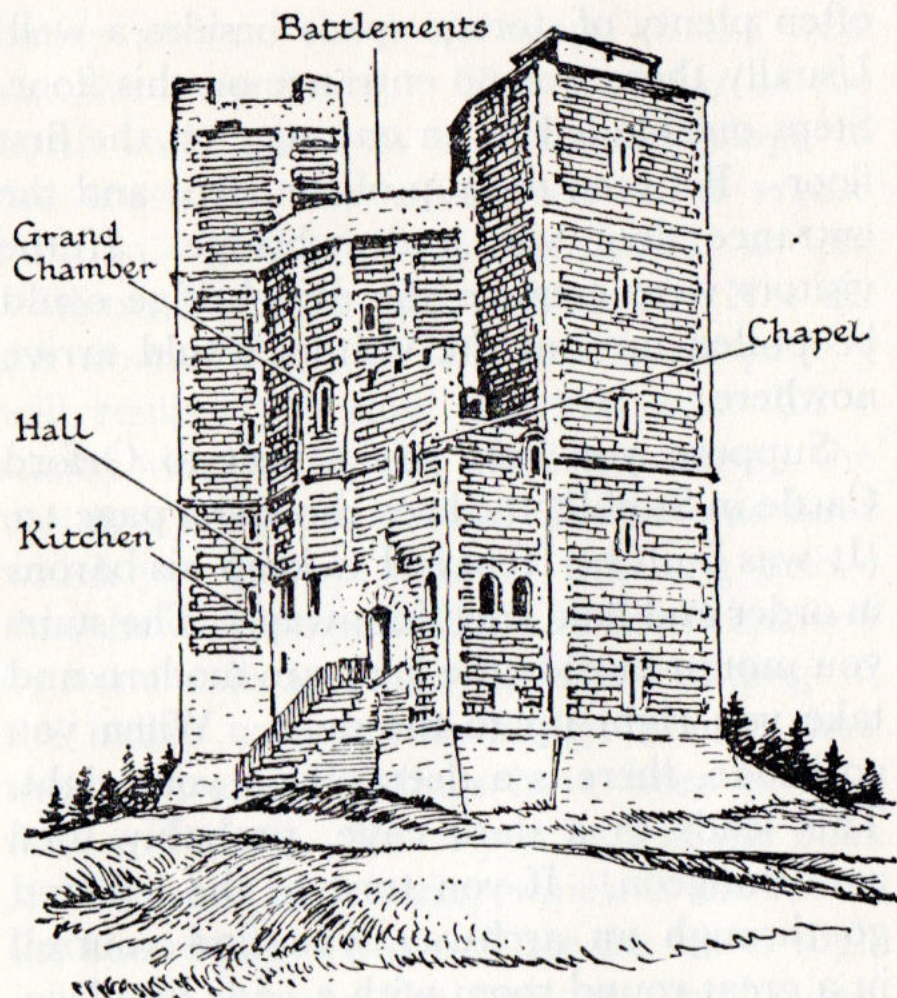
A keep was a place where a large number of people might have to live for many weeks without a chance to get food or water from outside, so on the basement floor there was

often plenty of storage space besides a well. Usually there was no entrance on this floor. Steps outside led to an entrance on the first floor. Between the top of the steps and the entrance door was a drawbridge. If the visitors were enemies the drawbridge could be pulled up and the visitors would arrive nowhere!

Suppose you can pay a visit to Orford Castle in Suffolk, the keep shown on page 10. (It was built by Henry II to keep his barons in order and hold enemies away.) The stairs you mount outside the keep are modern and take you right up to the door. When you go inside, there is a deep pit on your right. This leads to a dark cave, probably used as a dungeon. If you turn to the left and go through an archway, you find yourself in a great round room with a wide fireplace.

In Orford Castle, as in most keeps, there is one big room on each floor. This first-floor room seems to have been the hall of the castle. The hall was the living-room where the garrison took their meals. In one of three side towers is a kitchen. It has a big open fireplace and a sink where waste water can be poured away. Next to the kitchen is a lavatory. The Normans had no proper





system of drainage. Sewage as well as waste water from sinks usually went out by a shoot and down the wall towards the ditch.

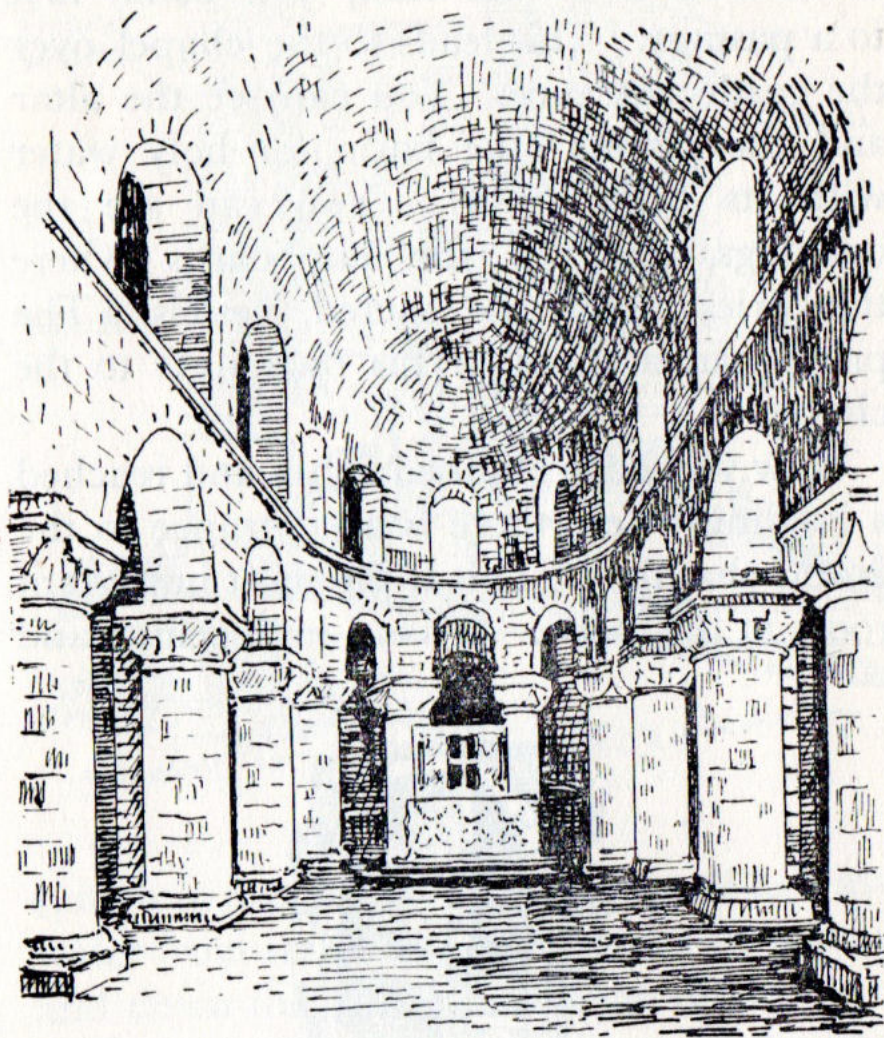
The staircase which takes you to the next floor is in a second tower. It is circular. The picture opposite shows part of the flight. But before you climb to the battlements you may want to go down into the basement

and see the well. It is deep—thirty-seven feet deep—and beautifully made. When you wind your way up again past the entrance to the hall, you come first to a passage. This leads to the chapel over the castle entrance. You can see the altar and the piscina (the basin for holy water with its little drain). You can see the openings, too, of the cupboards where the priest kept the sacred vessels. The priest had a room of his own next to the chapel.

Now you have climbed again and reached a landing where there is an entrance to the grand chamber. This is the most important room in the castle. It has a high ceiling and







*The chapel of a Norman castle—you can see this in the Tower of London*

once had a gallery round it. Like the room below, it has a big fireplace. Also like the room below, it is quite light, for there are narrow windows set, three in a row, in the thick walls. This room was specially used by the owner of the castle and his family. They also had two smaller rooms, in two side towers, and their own lavatory.

Next you climb to the roof. There you can see what the sentries once saw—all the country around and the sea beyond. In one of the high corner towers the sentries had their guard room. There they rested and kept their weapons. From a room in an opposite tower sometimes came the smell of bread baking. But if enemies were about, the smell from the oven may not have been of bread. It may have been of tar or oil, which was being heated to pour on the enemies' heads!

Not all keeps were alike. If you go to the White Tower in London, you will find more than one big room on each floor. Though at Orford Castle small rooms are in the three big 'corner' towers, at Colchester you will find small rooms in the thickness of the walls. But these are some of the things to look for in any keep you visit:



- (1) Very thick walls.
- (2) Narrow windows.
- (3) Loop-holes for arrows.
- (4) Round-topped arches to doors.
- (5) Winding staircases in towers.
- (6) A well.
- (7) A chapel.
- (8) A hall.
- (9) A guard-room.

#### CASTLES BUILT BY BARONS

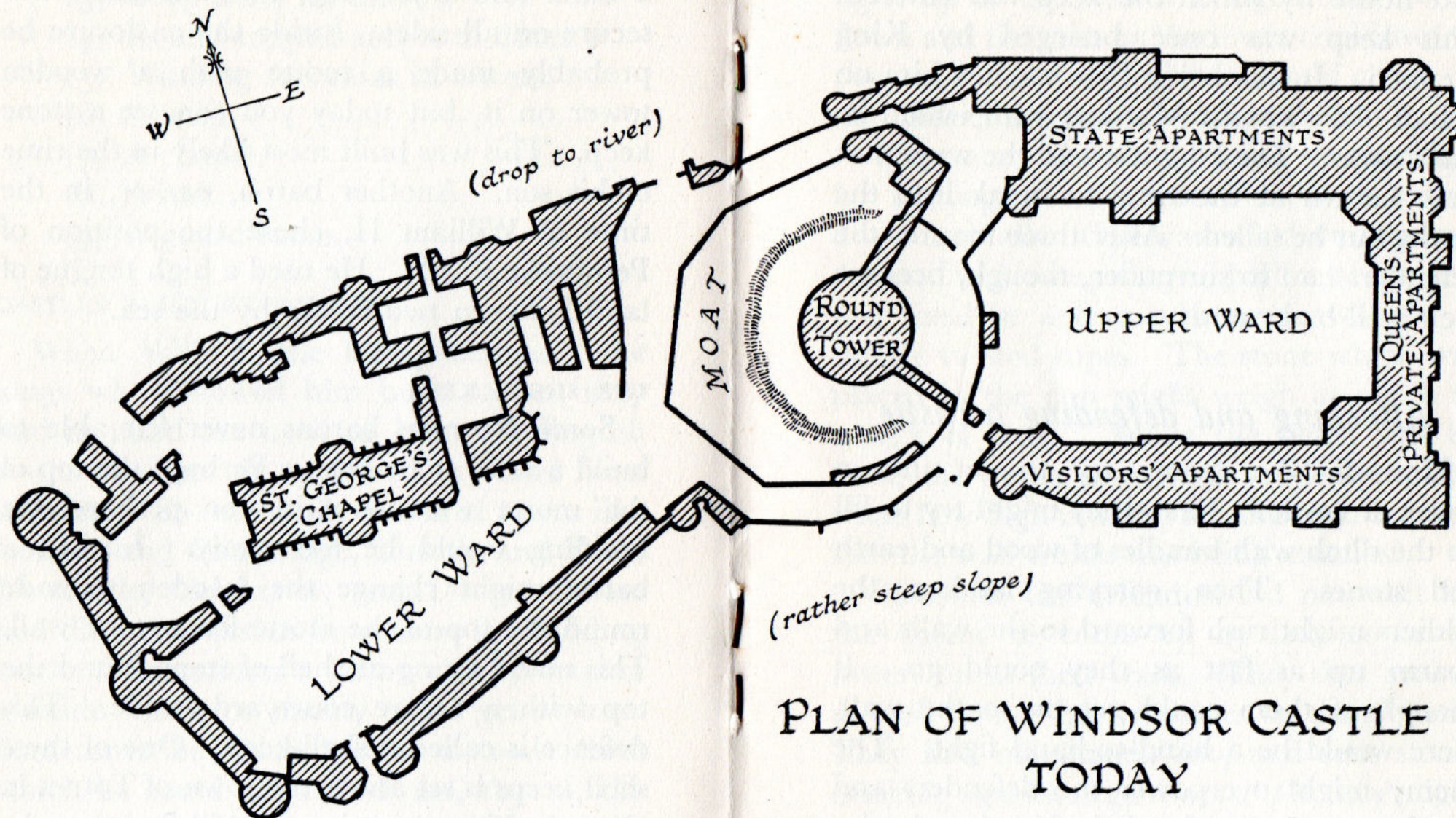
When William the Conqueror and the kings who followed him built castles, they had in mind the need to keep the English towns obedient or to defend the land from invaders. So they built castles at towns like London and Cambridge, Lincoln and York, Newcastle, Colchester, and Dover. Barons had different reasons from these for building castles. Sometimes a baron chiefly wanted a castle where no enemy could get at him. Sometimes he wanted most a castle from which he could control his fief, that is, the great stretch of land granted to him by the king. The baron who built the first Kenilworth Castle, in the time of Henry I, built it on land between two brooks. As the brooks joined just below the place, three

sides were defended by water. He had only to dig a big ditch on the fourth side and make a bank and a palisade, then his castle was secure on all sides. Inside the enclosure he probably made a motte with a wooden tower on it, but today you can see a stone keep. This was built most likely in the time of his son. Another baron, earlier, in the time of William II, chose the position of Pembroke Castle. He used a high tongue of land between two creeks by the sea.

#### THE SHELL KEEP

Some Norman barons never felt able to build a solid stone keep. Perhaps the top of the motte was too wide or perhaps the building would be too costly. Instead a baron might change the wooden palisade round the top of the motte for a stone wall. This made a ring or shell of stone round the top with a secure courtyard inside. This defence is called a shell-keep. One of these shell keeps is set above the town of Totnes in Devon. If you visit it, you will find that the wall is about two storeys high and has battlements on the top. If you go inside the shell, you can see that there was a walk for the defenders all round the wall at some





*(rather steep slope)*

PLAN OF WINDSOR CASTLE  
TODAY



distance from the top. Exeter also had a very large shell-keep. You can still see the gate-house by which the keep was entered. This keep was once besieged by King Stephen. It was being held against him on behalf of his cousin Matilda, with whom he was at war. The king tried all the ways that were known at the time to break into the castle, but he failed. After three months the defenders had to surrender, though, because their well had run dry.

### *Attacking and defending a castle*

How did the enemy try to get into a tower or castle? First, they might try to fill up the ditch with bundles of wood and earth and stones. Then, carrying ladders, the soldiers might rush forward to the walls and swarm up as fast as they could go. If enough of them could get on to the wall, there would be a hand-to-hand fight. The enemy might overpower the defenders and get the gates open for their friends. Again, instead of using ladders, the enemy might bring up siege towers. These were wooden towers, higher than the walls. They could be rolled forward on logs. Men on the top

could shoot at the defenders on the walls from above. If the tower could be brought right up to the wall a bridge could be let down and the men on the tower could swarm over on to the wall. Others could climb up the back of the tower and join them.

The enemy also would bring up machines for hurling stones or lead balls to smash down the walls. One was called a mangonel. A beam with a cup-shaped hollow at one end was fixed in a frame between two sets of tightly twisted ropes. The stone which was placed in the cup might weigh as much as a sack of coals. When the beam was let loose the ropes untwisted suddenly. The stone flew high into the air and then crashed into the wall which was being attacked.

Of course the defenders did not wait for the enemy to come up by ladders or by towers on to their walls. They shot arrows at their foes or hurled stones on their heads. They had mangonels, too, and sent stones crashing against siege towers. Or they might use a ballista. This was like a huge cross-bow set in a frame. It hurled iron bolts made like arrows. There is a story of how one bolt went through three men. The defenders also knew that siege towers might be set on





*Men on the wall defend their town with stones and cross-bows*

fire, so they might hurl burning pitch on to a tower which was brought near. Then the attackers had to use all sorts of ways of defending themselves. They covered the outside of their siege towers with skins (which must not be old or dry) to hinder the towers from catching fire. They made mantlets, wicker-work shields covered with hides. These they could carry in front of them or over their heads. Or they made a long penthouse, a kind of roof on wheels, to go over the heads of a line of men. This was specially useful if the attacker meant to use a ram or a bore.

The ram and the bore were used for breaking down walls. The leader of the attack might order carpenters to cut down the biggest tree in the neighbourhood and to fix on to it a heavy head. This made a ram. The ram was slung on chains between two big posts as near as possible to the castle wall. About sixty men were lined up alongside. On the command, they all hauled the ram back as far as the chains would allow. Then they let it swing, and the heavy head dashed itself against the wall. The bore was a pole with a sharp iron point at the end. It was used to make a round hole in the wall.



Neither the ram nor the bore was as dangerous to the defenders as mining. Today we think of a mine in war as something which explodes. The Normans did not use explosives. They dug. Some distance away from the walls of the tower or castle they began to make an underground passage. They worked this passage right down under the walls. Then bit by bit they pulled out stones and fixed wooden beams in their place. When they had taken out enough stones really to weaken the wall above, they set the beams alight. When these were burnt away, the wall above fell in. So there was a gap, through which the attackers could enter the town. It was by mining the walls that William the Conqueror was able to get into Exeter city. Stephen tried mining the walls of Exeter Castle when his troops could get in no other way, but he did not succeed.

### *Changes in castles*

A Norman keep might be so strong that attackers could not easily get in, but defenders often found that if the attackers got under the walls it was not easy to drive them away. So gradually the Norman kings

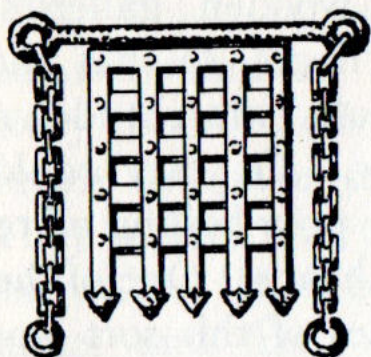
and barons made changes in castles. Sometimes, high up, they pushed out great beams from the castle walls. They laid planks on the beams and made wooden galleries. These had holes in the floors, so that the defenders could shoot bolts straight down on to the enemies below. Or they could drop stones upon them, or pour boiling oil or burning pitch upon their heads. One of the castles which had galleries of this sort was Hedingham, in Essex. All the same, when Hedingham was besieged by King John it was forced to surrender.

Another plan was to strengthen the curtain walls. These were the walls at the boundaries of the wards. Of course these walls were crenellated. That means that they were made with spaces along the top for the defenders to fire through. (The spaces are called embrasures.) But these walls were made much stronger if towers were placed along them at intervals. The towers curved out from the line of the wall and had loop-holes in their walls. Archers in the towers could shoot at people who were close underneath the walls.

Then, about the time of Henry II, many owners of castles began to build new, strong



gate-houses. There are a number of these gate-houses still to be seen. You can see one at Chepstow and another at Carisbrooke

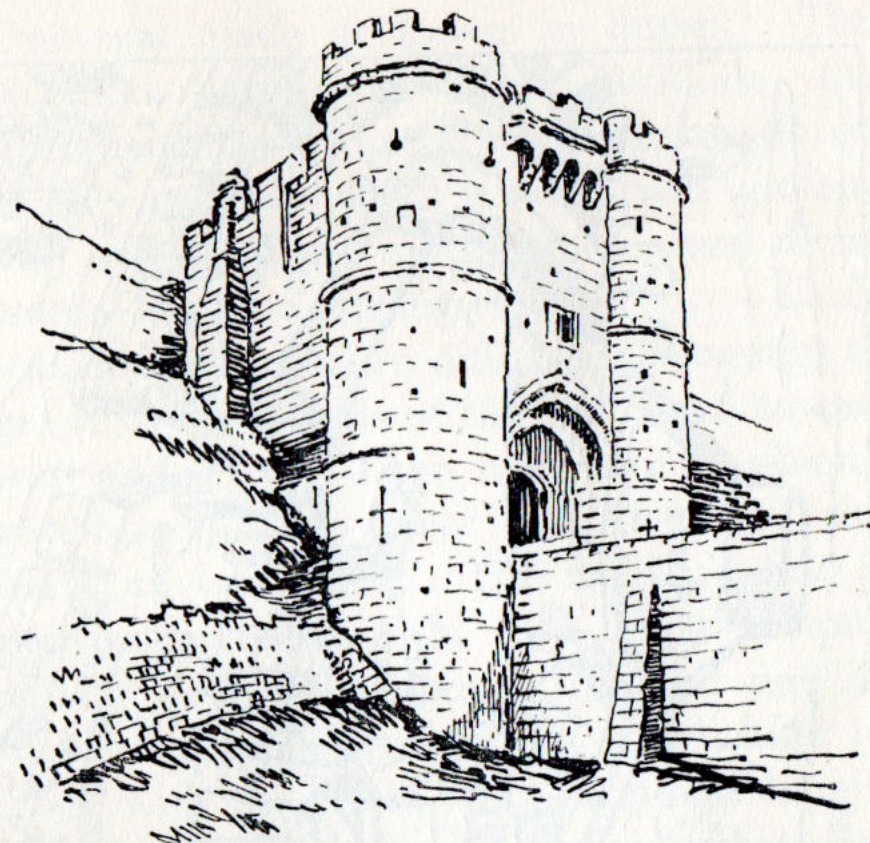


Castle. On either side of the gate is a strong round tower. The doorway itself was protected by a portcullis. A portcullis is an iron gate made like a grating. It hangs in a

recess above a doorway and can be let down when needed. It runs in grooves made in the sides of the doorway. In a castle such as Carisbrooke there was a special room above the gate called the portcullis chamber. There men worked the pulleys which moved the portcullis up and down. Above the portcullis chamber were other rooms where people might live.

In the picture of the gate-house at Carisbrooke Castle opposite you will see, high up, a stone gallery projecting above the gate. This gallery, like earlier wooden ones, has slits in its floor. Defenders of the gate could make things unpleasant for enemies battering at the gate below.

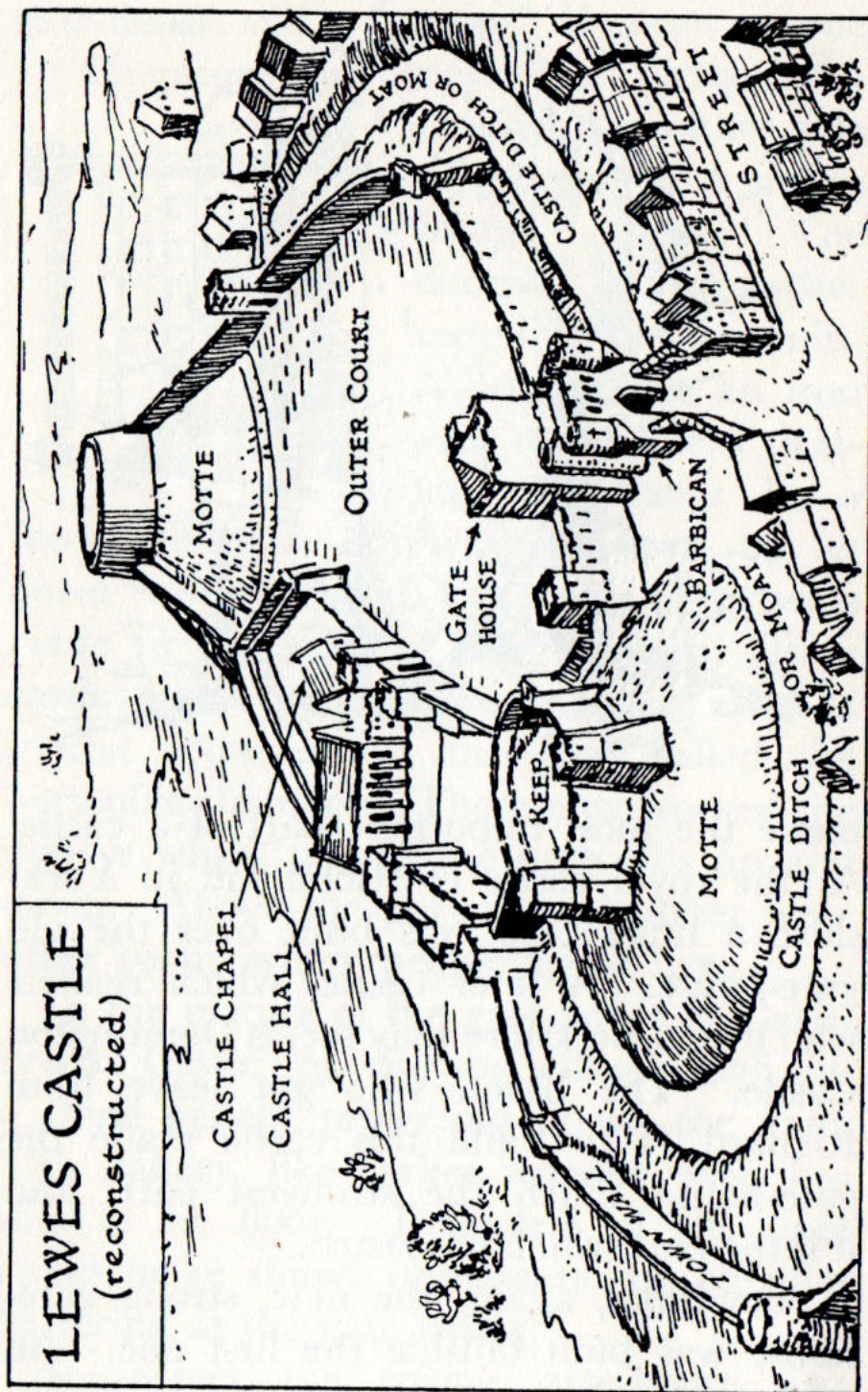
Sometimes the strong gate-house was



made the most important part of a castle. At the royal castle of Richmond in Yorkshire a huge keep was built over the old gate-house. A later castle, which readers who live in Berkshire may see, is Donnington Castle. The baron who got leave from Richard II to build this castle made the gate-house much the strongest part, and it is the part which has lasted.

Sometimes, again, the new, strong gate-house was built outside the first one. An outer defence like this is called a barbican.



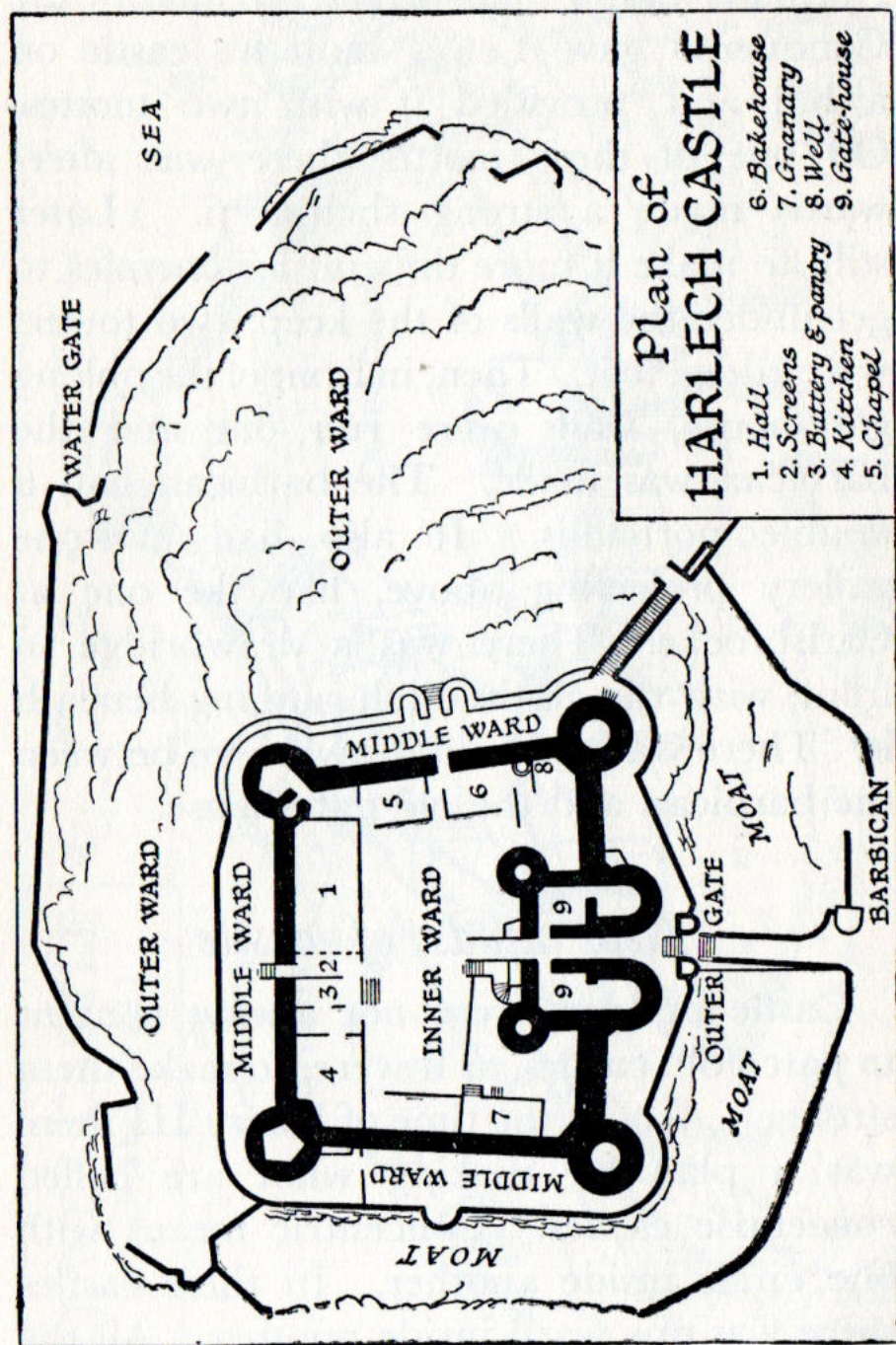


One was made at Lewes in Sussex. The Norman baron to whom William the Conqueror gave Lewes built his castle on a hill and provided it with two mottes. On one of these mottes there was afterwards made a strong shell-keep. Later still, to make it more difficult for enemies to get under the walls of the keep, two towers were added to it. Then, in front of the oblong gate-house, walls were run out and the barbican was made. The barbican had a double portcullis. It also had a stone gallery projecting above, like the one at Carisbrooke. There was a drawbridge in front, with the castle ditch running beneath it. There was a second drawbridge between the barbican and the old gate-house.

### *New kinds of castle*

Castle builders were not always content to patch old castles, as it were, to make them stronger. About the time of Henry III there was a plan for making what are called concentric castles. Concentric means with one circle inside another. In these castles there was one ward inside another. All the most important buildings were in the inner-

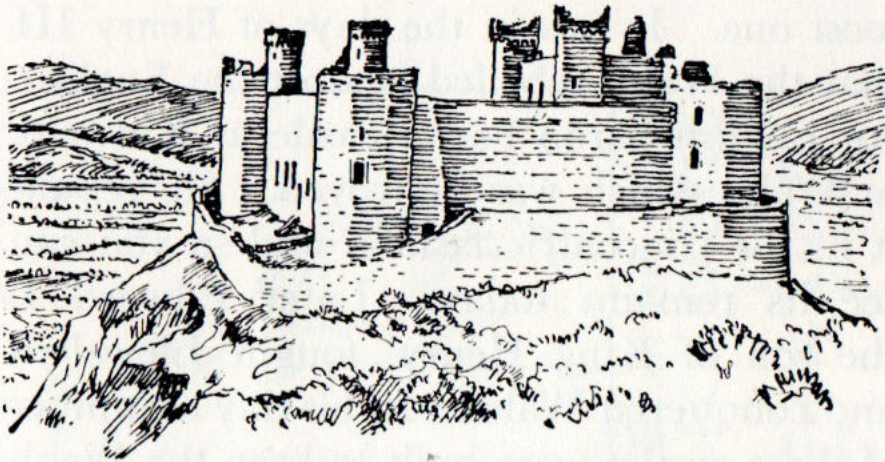




most one. It was in the days of Henry III that the Welsh rebelled against the English. An English baron had a castle at Kidwelly in Wales which was destroyed. He rebuilt it in the concentric fashion and so you can see its remains today. Later Edward I, the son of King Henry, fought Llewellyn and conquered Wales. In his day a number of these castles were built to keep the Welsh down. Harlech is one of these.

Look at the plan of Harlech Castle. You can see that the inner ward is right inside the middle ward. The outer ward does not encircle the castle. The moat does part of its work. But the outer ward is hardly a ward at all. It is a steep cliff, dropping down to the river mouth below, but with walls round it. Probably the walls were only built to make it safer for the defenders to get down by a steep curving path to the water-gate below. The middle ward is narrow and the walls round it were not high. The inner ward was the strong place. It had walls forty feet high. Enemies who reached the middle ward would be fired down upon by defenders in the great gate-house or in the strong towers at the corner of the ward.





This picture of Harlech Castle today is taken from the south-west (looking towards the tower which is at the top left-hand corner of your plan). You can see on the left under the walls the narrow platform of the middle ward, which has lost most of its outer wall. Below, the ground falls away to the river. The high towers at the back are those of the gate-house.

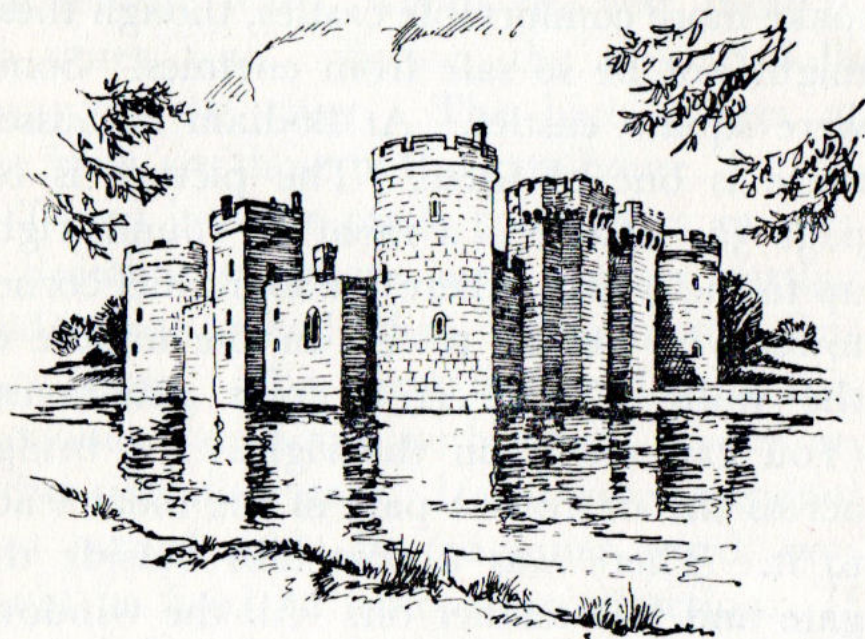
To get into the castle you had to go over a drawbridge (there was a deep cutting underneath), and then through the first gate-house. This brought you to the tremendous gate-house with round towers on either side of the gate. If you were an enemy and turned aside in the inner ward, you could be fired on from every direction. If you tried to batter your way through the gate-house you had a hard task before you.

But if you were a friend and were allowed in the inner ward, you would find that the garrison had quite comfortable buildings. There were rooms in the gate-house. There was a big dining-hall, with a pantry and kitchen. There was a bakehouse. On more than one occasion people in this castle stood a siege for months. They only surrendered when they were starving.

That was one trouble. Castles were places where you might stay safely till you starved. In time both kings and barons believed it was better to settle disputes by fighting in the open. Great men began to make more comfortable castles, though these might not be so safe from enemies. Some were square castles. At Bodiam in Sussex there is one of these. The picture is on page 32. There is a moat all round, right up to the walls. There are four chief corner towers, as well as towers in the middle of the walls. There is a great gate-house. (You can see it on the right.) A bridge across the narrowest part of the moat leads to it. There was a portcullis outside the gate and two further on. All the windows which face the moat are small. The gate-house leads into a courtyard. The hall, the



kitchen, the chapel and all the other buildings faced into this courtyard. Bodiam was quite a strong square castle. But there were other square castles built of brick instead of stone which could not have withstood much of a siege. By the middle of the fifteenth century soldiers were beginning to use cannon which could knock holes even in stone castles, so the man who built a brick castle was not expecting to stand a real siege. You can find more about these fortified houses in *Life in a Manor House*.



## Things to do

1. Make a model either of a motte and bailey castle or of a keep.
2. Visit any castle (or ruins of a castle) that is near you. Find out whether it was a royal castle or a baronial castle. Try to see why the castle was built on this site and how it could be defended.
3. Write an account of any castle you know. Illustrate it with diagrams or picture post cards.
4. Make a collection of pictures of castles or parts of castles.





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*Edited by Catherine B. Firth*

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